The Book of Hebrews

Introduction and Chapter 1

We will start off this lesson series with a description of when the Book of Hebrews (actually it was a letter) was written (approximately), who the book was written for, and why it was written. And then we will investigate who wrote the book.

Well, first we note that the book was written before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. (There are vague references to the Temple in chapter 9, so the Temple must be standing.) Now, because it is written to these people who believed that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and were, at some point, called Christians, then this must be during the time of Christian evangelism after Christ Himself had died and risen and ascended to heaven, also it was during increasing persecution of all of the Christians, from both the Romans and the Jewish leadership, so the date ranges could be from between 40 AD to 69 AD. (70 AD was when the Romans destroyed the Temple)

However, The Book was written to Jewish Christians; and these Jewish Christians were spread all over, from Jerusalem, and pockets of believers throughout Israel, and clear up to Rome and after the initial purge in Jerusalem during the late 40’s to early 50’s AD, they were scattered across Asia Minor, from Greece through what is now Turkey. We base this on the subject matter included in the book, and understanding that it was meant for the Jew by reference. However, another point to consider, the real missionary evangelism under Paul, did not begin with Barnabus and Paul until probably about 48 or 49 AD and reference to Timothy coming to visit them in Chapter 13. Therefore, we might find a date for this writing closer to about 55 AD to 60 AD.

There had been a persecution of Jewish Christians as early as probably the mid to late 30s AD by the pharisees and other temple leaders, especially a young pharisee named Saul of Tarsus, and by 41 AD, under King Agrippa I, the titular ‘king’ of Israel, the Jewish persecution of Jewish Christians as well as Gentile Christians had begun in earnest as this new movement had taken hold and was growing rapidly. And by the 60s AD under Nero, Rome began a terrible purge of all Christians from Israel, clear up to Rome, and in much of Asia Minor.

However, the Jewish Christians were getting a heavy dose of persecution and loss of property, from their own people, because they believed that their Temple worship was under attack, and the Law of Moses was being blasphemed by this Christian belief. They were branded as traitors, blasphemers, and fools.

This Book (letter) was written for encouragement, instruction, correction, comfort, and to keep the folks from apostasy or reverting back to Judaism under extreme pressure. What was happening through the Jewish leadership was the ploy of making the Jewish believers keep to the Law, where Jesus had died for them under the Law. This also became a bone of contention between Gentile Christians and Jewish believers in Rome as exemplified through the Book of Romans, where the Jewish believers were determined to make gentile Christians adhere to the Law as they felt they had to. So, in effect the Jewish believers were under constant persecution from the Pharisees and Priests of the Temple, but they also kept the Roman Christians under a persecutorial attitude.

They also needed to know that the Christian leadership in the Jerusalem Church understood all that they were going through, because that leadership was going through the very same thing. The writer wanted to encourage them to stand firm in their faith, and rely on Jesus, and then the writer instructs them that Jesus was who He said He was, that they could take comfort in this Jesus who literally died painfully and horribly first, for them.

As to who wrote this book, (letter) nobody knows, although many scholars have pushed for the idea that it probably was Paul. There are arguments for both Paul and anybody else, but because of the educated evidences within the writing it had to be someone who had studied the whole of the Old Testament (Tanakh). If it is Paul because he was most certainly a Pharisee, he began his ministry in earnest about the late 40’s AD before his missionary journeys. If it is not Paul, it could have been anybody who had a thorough knowledge of the whole of the Tanakh, and Jewish law, based on the educational level expressed by the author in this book (letter). One thing I do note is some of the phraseology sounds much like the Apostle John, especially if we contrast some of the sentences or sentence structures used with the beginning of the Gospel of John. With this being said, because all Scripture is God breathed, whoever actually wrote Hebrews is not as relevant as understanding that it came from God Himself.

A] Hebrews 1: 1 through 4; (read)

1] “*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,”*

Let’s start this off by looking at this verse, the author states that all their forefathers heard from God through the prophets God sent to them. The writer refers to all the writings given through Moses and all other writers down through the ages ending with Malachi, and this comprises the whole of the Tanakh, and is accepted by the Jews as revelations by God down through the ages and is sacred.

2] “*Has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things through who He also made the worlds;”*

The writer noting that God spoke through His prophets in the past, and God had now spoken to them through Jesus the Messiah, and this Messiah was the heir to all that God had, and actually was the creator with God. Many ancient scholars as well as some modern scholars try to make a lot more of this that need be. Jesus being God’s Son is indeed heir, and in fact already has all that God the Father has, along with the Holy Spirit. This IS God and all is God’s.

3] “*Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself, purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High,”*

There are many old Testament references to the ‘Glory’ (Shekinah) of God, especially with Moses and when His presence filled the newly built and dedicated Temple, and here this ‘brightness’ comes indeed to the physical person of Jesus. That is that ‘express image’ and the writer wants to show the reader the omnipotent power of the Holy One. Jesus did uphold His Laws, as we have studied before, this Jesus corrected the misconceptions and flagrant miscarriage of God’s justice in the Law, and then as the sacrificial Lamb of God took away the sins of those who believed in Him under the law. And when he was done with this work, went back and assumed his rightful position with God the Father.

4] “*Having become so much more than the angels, as He has by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they.”*

First; we acknowledge that Jesus was before the angels to begin with, they were created by Him, but He made Himself lower than the angels to come to man as man’s redeemer, and then returned to His place of Glory in Heaven, above the angels in position and power. And second; we can also remember that even as the Son, walking the earth as a man, the angels came and ministered to him on a couple of occasions, one being after the temptations.

B] Hebrews 1: 5 through 7; (read)

1] “*For, to which of the angels did he ever say, ’You are My Son, today I have begotten you?’ and again, ‘I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son.’”*

This will be a continuation of verse four where the writer explains that it wasn’t to these angels that God announced that they were the begotten (actually it renders ‘one and only’). My guess here is, the Jewish priests or Pharisees, tried to make up excuses for the Yeshua they crucified and are now trying to steer the believers away from. They may be alluding to this Yeshua as being maybe an angel or prophet, and not the expected Messiah.

Now what the writer is doing, is quoting from various old testament passages, and the first passage is from Psalm 2: 7 and the second passage was from 2 Samuel 7: 12 to 14; and the Jews should know these passage as they explain the meaning and character of Jesus as compared to the angels.

It seems to me that these Jewish leaders, in their zeal to break the ongoing thought of this worship of a Savior-Messiah, were using the angel reference to extremes, and our author here, is using the introduction of this letter to point out their error.

2] “*But when He again brings the first born into the world, He says, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.”*

The writer is using emphatic statements or quotes from first, Psalm 97: 7 and then second, Deuteronomy 32: 43; to refute the station of angels over the station of Jesus. If we remember the Christmas stories, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and who came to announce His coming? The angels. They were doing their job, they are the announcers, the messengers. This is placing them after the Messiah. They minister to and they worship Him, He does not worship them.

3] “*And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.”*

What this seems to say is these angels or announcers, and the ministers (probably more angelic beings) are doing God’s bidding, and announcing and ministering, with the descriptions of wind which the translators read as spirits, and of the fire. If we refer back to Psalms 104: 4, that is exactly what the Psalmist says; The angels are already spirits and move like the wind, and the ministers are as a strong fire, clearing all that is in their path.

C] Hebrews 1: 8 & 9; (read)

1] “*But to the Son, He says, “Your throne, oh God, is forever and ever. A scepter of Righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.”*

I notice that the writer now quotes another Psalm, Psalm 45: 6 & 7, and notice how God the Father calls the ‘Son’ God. This seems to an affirmation that the Son is every bit God as the Father is God, and the Throne is an everlasting throne and the scepter tells us that He is the King, a righteous King on a righteous Throne.

2] “*You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”*

From Psalm 45:7, Jesus was incorruptible, He was sinless and fully obedient to the Law. When you stop to think of it, He was the Law, God gave the Law to the Jews through Moses, and Jesus being God, was part and the whole of giving that Law because He was that Law to begin with. The writer is trying to establish, that Jesus being God was above all created things, and was the Law and the fulfillment of it. Again context; of Jesus being over the angels as well as all the kings and rulers of the earth

Now the next point; when a king or priest was consecrated and dedicated to their position, they were anointed by pouring scented oils over their head and it was a time of gladness, and This was the most joyous time as God the Father has anointed God the Son to be king over all creation, and no king or priest was ever so honored because none could compare to Him, even the angels. He was fully set apart.

D] Hebrews 1: 10 through 12; (read)

1] “*And: “You Lord, in the beginning laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.”*

Psalm 102: 25 through 27; the writer now explains that it is not enough He is above the Angels and all royalty of the earth, He IS the creator of the heavens and the earth. The angels are the created, Jesus, God the Son, is the creator. This, dear friends, gets to be the conundrum or mystery here. Differentiating between God the Father and God the Son. So Where does the God the Holy Spirit fit in here? That is the mystery only God can answer. Because as they are separate they are also one. They are the creator, the God of the whole universe. We need accept this because we think and imagine with human eyes, human hearts and human minds; and that makes us unable to see with Gods eyes, God’s heart, and God’s mind, and we can never, even minutely, understand those things of God.

I have said this before as have so many writers and teachers; today, we have made God in our own image, when truly it is the other way around. How many pictures and icons are out there trying to depict Jesus, God and the angels? How many times do we rationalize our relationship with God, in defense of our own inadequacies, flaws and sins? Frankly, even as I sit here studying and writing this lesson, trying to poorly explain to you all about these mysteries, I don’t really get all of it either. However that is why we study, study, study.

2] “*They will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment. Like a cloak you will fold them up, and they will be changed, but you are the same, and your years will not fail.”*

As all things are created, all things have a life span, don’t they? However, as the writer rightly explains, the creator remains and remains unchanged. God is beyond time because he created time. To the vastness of the known and unknown universe, it is all His. He created it all. Let the science fiction writers get a hold of that! Imagination is a wonderful thing and to be true, sci-fi writers have been trying for a couple of centuries now, to imaging God or gods and His or their creation. There was even an episode on the original Star Trek where the Enterprize, through a series of misadventures wound up at the beginning of where ‘creation’ was supposed to be. And on a couple of shows tried to tell the audience they met the creator or omnipotent beings, such as ‘Q’.-----right!

The next point the writer illustrates with the cloak, which all can see, feel and understand, that these things get old and eventually disintegrate, they are all organic in nature and become moth food. They have a definitive life span, and need to be renewed every once in a while. I have even wondered about webs of catepillars, worms, spiders, that in nature have a lifespan, but silk weaving and I have a couple, seem to last for centuries. I know that eventually they too will be destroyed. Everything has a life span, even the angels, by the way, as we know the fallen angels will meet their end, won’t they?

E] Hebrews 1: 13 & 14; (read)

1] “*But which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your foot stool.”*

Again, a quote, this time from Psalm 110:1. An oft quoted passage concerning the deity of Christ and the place He should occupy. This is the affirmation of Jesus being over the angels.

2] “*Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation?”*

Angels as created beings have jobs to do too, and one of those jobs they have is to minister to those who will be saved IN THE FUTURE!! (note this, Dr. J Vernon McGee picked up on that) They do not have the job of sitting on the throne administrating, they do the work.

Dr. McGee made this observation; Christ is the Son: angels are servants; Christ is king: angels are subjects; Christ is creator, angels are creatures.

By all this, the writer of Hebrews has laid out the treatise of the Christ as being superior to all creation including the angels, I guess as I explained at the start of this lesson, to refute any arguments from the Jewish priests and Pharisees.